

Position Paper #1

Jennifer M. Dang

Alliance Graduate School of Counseling - Alliance University

GCN 618: Theology in Mental Health Counseling

Dr. Julio Orozco

Due Date: Wednesday, February 21, 2023

Personal Biblical Anthropology & *Imago Dei*

I have been shaped by Christian teaching and values up to this point in my career. This is difficult to admit as my journey in the Christian faith has been (and still is) filled with doubt and unsure how to make sense of Christian practices. For me to address my counseling approach, first, I hesitantly, yet with acceptance, share that I believe these to be true:

I believe that who I am and humanity is sinful; that we fall short and can never in our being or doing save ourselves from the judgment of eternal death and separation from God. I believe that Jesus Christ was a real man and God. He was born of the Virgin Mary to intercede for sin by becoming the atoning sacrifice. He was blameless and holy, the only one righteous enough not to die but willingly did so that I stand faultless and gain an eternal relationship with God in this life and life after death. My purpose in this current life is to live in a manner that reflects His love and desire to have an authentic connection with people that changes their lives. Living a life that reflects Him would be an act of worship, true freedom, and a willing choice to center my life around this message of salvation. I believe Jesus became a man and maintained His position as God. Thus, His sacrifice was rooted in love to do good for the human race, whether or not anyone was aware of their need. I believe He continues to participate actively in my life and cares about my experiences on this Earth. This prevenient grace given by Jesus speaks to His character and view of people. Thus, His personhood addresses my view of people and my approach to counseling.

Counseling Approach

The story of Jesus captivates me and stirs within me a sense of incomprehensible awe. “What is man that You are mindful of him?” (*Psalms 8:4 (NIV)*, n.d.). This bible verse reflects my

question as I face the vastness and depth of His love. It overwhelms me and brings me to a place of safety and warmth. Holeman (2014) shares that without God's initiation for a relationship, we would or could not ever come to respond to His actions and be drawn to Him. Romans 3:23 mentions that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (*Romans 3:23 (NIV)*, n.d.). Jesus knew this fact about people, yet He still chose to step in to receive the blame because we could never be blameless on our own. In doing so, He cleared our records and saved us from eternal separation from God, ushering us into peace, oneness, and healing. To believe that I am undeserving but was deemed worthy prompts me to practice my eyes, ears, and heart to view others with the same dignity, respect, and worth that is inherent to them. The death of Jesus for all is a greater draw for me to engage with people than the knowledge of all being made in His image. There are moments when I find it grievous to see God's image in someone else because it is not as easily reflected in someone's behaviors or speech that are opposite of God's character. Therefore, the concept of universality, nonmaleficence, and benevolence are continually practiced as I encounter clients whose experiences and situations differ from mine, whether good or bad, because Jesus looked at everyone, and I picture Him saying, "You are worthy, I'll die for you whether or not you accept Me."

I believe that God is omniscient and omnipotent. He has every detail in mind. Therefore, as a clinician, I can operate from a place of healthy boundaries when relating to my clients without the need to overexert, panic, or be their savior. Holeman (2014) explains that self-differentiation is the ability to take responsibility for oneself while closely relating to another. I believe that God is active in the lives of believers and non-believers. Therefore, as the therapeutic relationship grows in trust and rapport, I can trust that He sees them when I am away from clients or when they continue in their lives after a session. In situations with strong

countertransference, I remember that Jesus gave Himself time to pray (*Matthew 14:22-23 (NIV)*, n.d.). He never panicked or rushed Himself into situations. Differentiation requires balancing emotions and cognitions and allowing for autonomy and intimacy in interpersonal relationships (Holeman, 2014). In the same way, Jesus recognized His position as the Son of God, His desire for oneness with people, and wanting to be in a relationship with them, but He also allowed people the freedom to choose. He had all authority to rewrite this world or force everyone to bow to Him, but He chose to do the opposite and humbly die. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He was a prime example of what it looked like to wrestle between thoughts and emotions. Yet, He maintained His position and responsibility to die without coercion of those guilty to take His place. As a counselor, I plan to practice my best self-awareness to take note of my countertransferences and maintain a level of care that promotes my clients' highest well-being, allowing them to practice their free will and move them toward healthier relationships.

The heartbreak I feel when I see wrong in this world is due to the instillation of His image and Spirit in me. I grew up being taught to conceal my anger and experienced confusion. It was not until my adult years that I learned to be attuned to the reasons behind my anger and regulate how I responded to this emotion. In many Bible stories, God reveals Himself as a Judge and brings justice to the oppressed, weak, and disadvantaged. He commands His people to “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed” (*Psalms 82:3 (NIV)*, n.d.), love the foreigner (*Deuteronomy 10:17-19 (NIV)*, n.d.), and rebuke mistreatment of widows and orphans (*Jeremiah 22:3 (NIV)*, n.d.). He must feel angry for the exploitation that still happens today because I have found myself perplexed and alarmed at the things I have heard or witnessed. This anger moves me to consider my part in the greater scheme of this work as a counselor, that this is more than just a job or a paycheck. This career is an

extension of the mission God has ordained for me. It has affirmed that I am not a bystander facing people's hardships. That my own disturbance is in alignment with God's heart for the hurting and induces a need for action and advocacy in the lives of my clients. When I struggle with disappointment in the world or people, I am reminded that God sees, listens, and acts in ways I cannot fathom.

The *Imago Dei* and my interpretation of my biblical anthropology help to center my interactions with clients. Currently, these are the reflections I have been able to acknowledge for myself. As I continue on this journey, I hope to discover how the integration of my faith addresses my clinical practices.

References

BibleGateway.com: A searchable online Bible in over 150 versions and 50 languages. (n.d.).

<https://biblegateway.com/>

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 (NIV). (n.d.). Bible Gateway.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+14%3A22-23&version=NIV>

Holeman, V. T. (2012). *Theology for Better Counseling: Trinitarian Reflections for Healing and Formation.* IVP Academic.

Jeremiah 22:3 (NIV), n.d. Bible Gateway.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+14%3A22-23&version=NIV>

Matthew 14:22-23 (NIV). (n.d.). Bible Gateway.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+14%3A22-23&version=NIV>

Psalms 8:4 (NIV). (n.d.). Bible Gateway.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+8%3A4&version=NIV>

Psalms 82:3 (NIV). (n.d.). Bible Gateway.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+3%3A23&version=NIV>

Romans 3:23 (NIV). (n.d.). Bible Gateway.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+3%3A23&version=NIV>